

Trudeau gives few answers, but tells Commons Canada doesn't engage in espionage abroad

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OTTAWA — Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau drew a veil of secrecy yesterday over espionage activities carried out by Canada within its territory. While at the same time he formally assured the Commons that Canada engages in no espionage abroad.

He was responding in the Commons to questions provoked by a Canadian Broadcasting Corp. program that stated Wednesday night that espionage work both inside and outside of Canada is carried out by the communications branch of the National Research Council.

"The Canadian Government has always collected what information was available to it in its territory," Mr. Trudeau told the House. "We have never, to my knowledge, certainly not under my Government, engaged in any espionage abroad, in the sense that we have not been looking for information in an undercover way in any other country."

Mr. Trudeau would not give information, however, on the extent or the means of espionage carried on in Canada. As he left the Commons he refused to submit himself to the questions of reporters.

"It's too delicate," he said in the Government lobby.

Both the Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp were critical of the hour-long television program, but neither of them stated categorically that the statements made in the program were unfounded.

When asked by Erik Nielsen (PC, Yukon) whether he would inform the people of Canada about surveillance equipment used by the Department of National Defence and the National Research Council, "in the light of the revelation of last night's program," Mr. Trudeau answered noncommittally.

"The honorable member might be wise to talk about allegations rather than revelations, if he is referring to last night's program," Mr. Trudeau replied.

"Certainly there have been allegations made, some of which I know to be false, but on the general principle of assembling information which might help Canada in preserving the security of its territory, or indeed even in exchanging information with some of our friends and allies, there is clear admission by the Government that this is done."

Mr. Nielsen recalled that last spring he had put a question on the Commons order paper about the use of surveillance equipment to monitor the whole telephone system in the Ottawa area. But Mr. Trudeau would not be drawn into a discussion of the Government's information gathering.

"The honorable member is asking how it is done, by what means and in what areas," he said. "He is referring specifically to some systems around Ottawa. My answer is that we do not answer that kind of question and we do not intend to."

The question of the television program was raised by John Diefenbaker (PC, Prince Albert), who said that it could disrupt relations between Canada and the United States. Mr. Diefenbaker asked Mr. Sharp whether the program had been submitted for security clearance before it was aired.

He also asked Mr. Sharp what he had to say "concerning the particular alleged revelations that the National Research Council of Canada is being used as a secret intercepting and bugging agency working with the United States National Security Agency."

Mr. Sharp answered that the program had not been cleared, and then he angered Mr. Diefenbaker by the rest of his reply.

"As to security, I would like to say to him (Mr. Diefenbaker) that there has been no change in the arrangements regarding the activities talked about on this program since he was Prime Minister of this country."

"Any suggestion that anything of that kind was done when I was Prime Minister I say is false," Mr. Diefenbaker shot back. He called the minister's answer "smart-aleck stuff."

Mr. Sharp rose to assure the former Prime Minister that he was perfectly serious in his answer, and repeated once again that "there has been no change in the activities carried on in the field of intelligence and of general information" since Mr. Diefenbaker ceased to be Prime Minister in 1963.

"I thought this would reassure him," Mr. Sharp said. But he agreed with Mr. Diefenbaker that the allegations made on the program "are both most mischievous and misleading."

Mr. Sharp was asked by Stuart Leggatt (NDP, New Westminster) whether the scientific capability of the National Research Council has been impaired "as a result of this revelation that it may be engaged in this kind of activity."

"The answer, Mr. Speaker, is no," Mr. Sharp replied, though he did not comment on whether the NRC was engaged in espionage-related activity.

Mr. Trudeau rejected only one specific allegation raised by the program.

He was asked by Joseph Clark (PC, Rocky Mountain) about Canadian participation "in the four-party intelligence

treaty operative between the United States, Great Britain, France and Australia."

"If the honorable member is referring to the specific treaty called UK-USA, the answer is that we are not party to such a treaty."

When Mr. Clark returned with a slightly broader question, asking about Canadian participation "in any four-party intelligence treaty or arrangement" with these countries, Mr. Trudeau shifted his ground.

"I understand that the treaty question was one which was raised on the program last night, and that is why I replied in specific terms," he said.

"In general terms, there is, as I said in reply to the first question, exchange of information with our friends and allies on intelligence and security matters. We hope that we are the beneficiaries of such an exchange when it does take place."

As he was leaving the Commons, Mr. Trudeau was approached by reporters who wanted to question him about the security questions raised in the Commons.

"I don't want to comment on questions of security," he said. "It's much too delicate. The danger is that you will drag out confidences from me and I'll say things that I'll regret."